

LINCOLN THE SOLDIER

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No one will deny the courage of the uniformed soldier who goes forth to battle. Neither will any one withhold from him the credit and respect to which he is entitled.

But not all soldiers wear uniforms. Neither do all soldiers die upon the battle-fields 'mid shot and shell.

There are soldiers who do not know how to operate a gun; who do not go forth to battle amid the beating of drums, the waving of flags or the cheering of people.

There are soldiers who fight, not upon the battle-fields, but upon the field of thought. Upon the battle-field there is somewhat of an equal contest. Man power can be met with man power and destructive explosives with devastating projectiles. But infinitely more courage and superior ammunition are required to do battle in the larger arena of human action.

The progress of mankind has been one bitter struggle against the forces of reaction; a battle of herculean effort against invisible and deadly enemies.

On the battle-field, the roaring of guns and the bursting of shells are a signal that the enemy is approaching and preparation is made by the defending army to withstand the attack; but in the battle for human progress, the enemy gives no such signs of approach.

Ignorance, Hatred, and Superstition are the malignant enemies of the human race. These vicious enemies do not fight in open fields. They do not fight fairly. With them equal combat is unknown. Their victories are won in the dark. Stealth and hypocrisy are their weapons.

Thousands have died, millions have died in mortal combat upon the battle-fields in defense of their country, in defense of their homes, in behalf of liberty.

And thousands, yes millions, have died in that grand army of human progress,—soldiers in the army of Science, of Art, of Medicine, of Invention and Discovery, and in the Army of Justice and Freedom.

The world is ever ready to do homage to the soldier upon the battle-field. But in the realm of human progress it is lamentably true that only too often does the gallant soldier receive rebuke and calumny for his reward.

Seldom, in his own day, does the soldier who fights for liberty taste the fruits of his victory.

Abraham Lincoln, the Soul of America, was a soldier in both of these armies. He donned a uniform, shouldered a gun, and marched to battle in defense of his country. He suffered the hardships and en-

dured the trials of a soldier's life. As captain of a regiment in the Black Hawk War in 1832, Lincoln acquitted himself with honor. And upon his return from battle he received the plaudits of his countrymen.

War brutalizes our natures and hardens our hearts; it warps our thoughts and makes us callous to the sufferings of human life.

But Lincoln never permitted war to harden his heart nor stunt his feelings. He was possessed of a rare love for humanity. His kindness knew no bounds and his honesty was so wide-spread that he was affectionately known as "Honest Abe." There were many who chided him for his "softheartedness," but Lincoln was LINCOLN and was not to be swayed from his convictions.

Lincoln's soul was touched with the kinship of life by the magic wand of a mother's love. To Lincoln his mother was his Star of Hope, his Rainbow of Life, the myriad-colored arch that ever beckoned him to "carry on." Lucky indeed is the child whose mother inspires him with humanitarian ideas and thoughts and with the urge that he may so live that when he passes on, the world will be better for his having lived.

Lincoln never forgot the lowliness from which he came and it was the memory of his hardships which caused him never to abuse his power except on the side of mercy.

You remember the case of William Scott? While Scott was on sentry duty, after a strenuous day of fighting, and exhausted from the wear and tear of battle, his strength failed him and he fell prostrate upon the ground. When discovered by another soldier and awakened, it was revealed that he was dreaming of his mother, and that she had awakened him to remind him of his duty as a soldier!

But in time of war, excuses for being asleep while on sentry duty are not acceptable or valid, and Scott was taken to his superior officer, tried by court-martial, convicted and condemned to be shot!

The case was brought to Lincoln's attention. His heart was touched. He could not make himself believe that the boy was a traitor, and ordered his release. You know what followed: Scott died fighting valiantly for the cause!

On another occasion a woman went to the White House and begged an audience with the President. Her husband had been captured, tried, convicted and was to be shot. Lincoln consented to see her. She told her story and pleaded with the President to suspend judgment. Lincoln asked her whether her husband was a good man and whether he treated her children kindly. She replied that he was a good husband and a good father and that the family could not live without him. She said he was a fool about politics and if she ever got him home he would do no more fighting for the South. "Well," said Lincoln, "I will pardon your husband and turn him over to you for safe keeping." The poor woman, overcome with joy, sobbed as though her heart would break. "My dear woman," said Lincoln, "if I had known how badly it was going to make you feel, I never would have pardoned him." "You don't understand," cried the woman between her sobs. "You don't understand, Mr. Lincoln." "Yes, yes, I do," answered the President, "and if you do not go away at once I shall be crying with you."

In our thoughts of Lincoln let us not forget that he was a human being, born just as you and I were born. Only that his hardships were immeasurably greater than ours, his difficulties far more numerous. He had to struggle for everything he possessed. He had no teachers. He was self-taught. Tramping through the woods for six miles to borrow a grammar is an indication of his thirst for knowledge and the obstacles he overcame to acquire it.

He had an unquenchable desire to learn. A burning urge to accomplish. This urge prompted him to read every book he could get. He was once asked what he was reading, and he replied: "I'm not reading—I'm studying." He was particularly fond of controversies. He loved an argument. He was never satisfied unless the sparks flew in the discussions. "Hew to the block, let the chips fly where they will," was his motto. And fortunately this trait of Lincoln's broke down all barriers and prejudice in seeking knowledge. He was carried on the wave of Rationalism which swept this country in the Forties. This brought him in contact with the writings of Voltaire, Volney and Paine. They were his intimates.

Voltaire had shot his bolts at the caste system of Europe and the chains began to fall from the minds and bodies of men.

Thomas Paine was the first man on the American continent to raise his voice in behalf of the negro slaves.

Fired by these men with the love of Liberty and human rights, Abraham Lincoln entered the Army of Progress.

I see him on a flat boat navigating down the Mississippi River. I see him arrive at New Orleans. I see him in company with two friends come upon the market place. I see him watch the sale of a negro slave girl. I see him rebel at the revolting scene. As the girl is examined by her bidders, her flesh pinched, her form displayed, her nudity exposed, I see his sad face become more sorrowful, I see him clench his fist, and with a quiver in his voice, and an oath upon his lips, utter this statement: "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing (meaning slavery), I'll hit it hard."

On his return to Springfield I see him enter the political arena with a short but crude declaration only to be concluded by that everlasting monument to his name, the Emancipation Proclamation.

I now see him competing for public office. I see him defeated, halted in his march. But defeat and discouragement were words not to be found in Lincoln's vocabulary. When questioned concerning his defeat he said he felt like the boy who was too big to cry and too hurt to laugh. Determination was the quality of Lincoln's character and he knew that "the harder the struggle the more glorious the triumph," and so we see him overcoming the obstacles which had beset his path.

We now see him in his famous debates with Douglass, determining whether the nation can remain "half slave and half free," and whether "a house divided against itself can stand." And in this struggle let us not lose sight of the fact that Lincoln received the brunt of the battle. He was the most misunderstood and hated man of his day. The people did not welcome the economic and social

changes which he advocated. The vilest of arguments were used against him. Arguments now known to be utterly ludicrous. He was vilified. He was slandered. The churches of his day opposed him and bigotry supported their contention. Let us take a lesson from the way Lincoln was treated and be not too ready to dismiss a new idea or condemn a new proposal.

In his fight for human emancipation he met the bitterest foes of battle. But not once did he falter, not once did he swerve. He had tasted battle as a soldier fighting for human rights against an institution whose only strength was that it was supported by "divine right." But Lincoln knew that man had no property right in man, and that the marks of the vicious lash upon the tender skin were not and could not be right by divine sanction, and that the damnable institution of slavery was a living lie against our sacred Declaration of Independence!

We see Lincoln gaining in his struggle. We see a convention assembled. We see him nominated for President by an almost unanimous acclamation! We see him at the head of the Republic, Commander-in-Chief of its army, to determine "whether this nation, or any nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal can long endure!"

We see him appealing for support—appealing to the nation's men to fight the battle of freedom. After many anxious and uncertain moments we hear the murmur of footsteps and the beating of drums and the welcome exclamation: "We are coming Father Abraham, we are coming 300,000 strong!"

And we see Lincoln, this giant of a man, who was too big to cry and too hurt to laugh, weeping for joy at the triumph that 3,000,000 human beings were to be released from the shackles of bondage; weeping for joy that the American Flag, the dearest emblem in all the world, was to rise once more over a united nation without a blemish and without a stain!

It is the duty of the soldier upon the battle-field to carry the flag of the country for which he fights, and if perchance he is shot and wounded and falls, another soldier must lift it from his hands and carry it high to battle, and this was the task delegated to Lincoln. He carried the flag of freedom which the American Revolutionists had given to Washington, and just as victory was won, just as he crossed the line with the flag waving high, this grand man, this soldier of the Republic, this Liberator, was struck down in battle and died that millions might be free!

Upon the grave of Lincoln, the military soldier, let us drop flowers of gratitude and upon the brow of Lincoln the Emancipator, the soldier in the Army of Liberty, let us place a wreath as a symbol of the everlasting love and thanks of the human race.